

Louise de Koven Bowen

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Few people have heard of Louise de Koven Bowen despite her many accomplishments and her close friendship with Jane Addams. This influential Illinoisan dedicated her life to educating women about their rights and to helping juveniles live in a healthy environment. She published two books and several pamphlets as well as other educational material. Louise was a suffragette, author, children's activist, philanthropist, feminist, wife, and mother of four.

Born in Chicago in 1859, Louise lived there for most of her early childhood. Hers was a comfortable life since her family was wealthy; nevertheless, Louise committed herself to helping those less fortunate. She wrote two influential books. *Safeguard for Youth at Work or at Play* addressed the need for regulating drugs and providing a better environment for all children. *Growing Up with a City* discussed Louise's involvement in the struggle for women's and children's rights.

Louise's friendship with Jane Addams began when Addams invited Louise to join the Hull House Women's Fund. They shared many common goals, and Louise served as treasurer and trustee for 35 years. She later became the president of the Women's Club, an organization that encouraged women to participate in business and politics. Louise also provided financial support to several other organizations. Her contributions to Bowen Hall and the Boy's Club exceeded \$500,000, and in 1911, she donated 72 acres of land in Waukegan, Illinois, which became the Joseph T. Bowen Country Club, a summer retreat for Hull-House children.

Louise was also a member of Chicago organizations that encouraged women to vote and to become more independent. She served as an officer in many of them and even attempted to become the Republican candidate for mayor of Chicago, but she did not win the nomination. She claimed that women were not fully exercising their right to vote and that was why men were continuing to dominate politically. As a member of the Chicago Equal Suffrage Association, Bowen not only encouraged women to vote, she also encouraged them to take political action and to seek government office.

Bowen was also one of the first women in Chicago to address the needs of children. At the time, children were treated poorly within the legal system; hence, Bowen, along with other women reformers and the Chicago Bar Association, fought to separate delinquent children from adult offenders. In 1898, the court agreed, although no provision to pay probation officers was made. To remedy the problem, the Juvenile Court Committee (JCC) was formed to raise money for salaries. In 1904, Louise served as the vice-president of the Juvenile Court Committee, although in 1907, the JCC disbanded due to lack of funding. Bowen then formed the Juvenile Protection Association (JPA). In addition to fundraising, the JPA disseminated public health and social welfare papers, and Louise served as president of the JPA for 25 years.

Bowen also led a campaign to regulate the sale of liquor on the streets and to prohibit liquor sales in public dance halls. The law she proposed was passed when Carter H. Harrison, Jr. was mayor. When “Big Bill” Thompson was elected mayor, however, public reform became harder, and regulations were not enforced as strictly as before. Peddlers continued to sell liquor near and even in dance halls without consequences.

In conclusion, Louise's hard work significantly helped women. They followed her example and actively sought jobs in government. They voted in greater numbers. Hull House became a safe and supportive environment for children, and juveniles lived in delinquency centers separate from adult criminals. In short, Bowen left a rich legacy for the state of Illinois. [From *Biography of Louise de Koven Bowen*. 1996.

<http://www.uic.edu/depts/lib/specialcoll/services/rjd/findingaids/LBowenf.html>

(Aug. 25, 2008); Chicago Sun-Times *Illinois Women*, (1996); Agness Gilman, *Mrs. Joseph Tilton Bowen*; and *Hull-House Highlights*. 2001.

<http://www.uic.edu/jaddams/hull/newdesign/highlights4.htm> (Sept. 4, 2008).]